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THE CINDERELLA OF THEOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT [1]

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MORE than once the doctrine of the Spirit (Pneumatology) has been called the Cinderella of Theology. If this was so in the past, and is perhaps still, it now requires our full attention. At the risk of viewing the situation through 'continental' eyes, but hoping you will recognize this, I would say that the nineteenth century, impressed by the advance of science, confronted theology in the first place with problems raised by natural science. Its first question concerned the nature of God, especially in connection with creation. Scientific historical inquiry paid attention to the Bible, and in the New Testament focussed its interest upon the question of the historical Jesus. This work culminated and came to a temporary halt in Albert Schweitzer's, The Quest of the Historical Jesus. A revival of Systematic Theology and Dogmatics followed, and in the opinion of the dogmatists the connecting lines between theology viewed from a cosmic standpoint and the Gospel were too long. The same thing was seen happening in the historical study of religions which came to cover an ever-widening field. On the other hand, however, they could not be satisfied with a 'life of Jesus,' so that Christology began to occupy a central place which it has held during the last few decades. And, if Pneumatology received any attention at all, its allotted place was small.

In any case, the doctrine of the Spirit was approached from a conception of the Trinity, closed or unfolded in its different elements. And this happened even when theologians tried to return

[1] A paper read at a conference at Le Chambon arranged by the International Congregational Council.

to a supposed Biblical period prior to any conception of the Trinity. There remained the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, conceptions determined by many factors, and approached from the christological angle: without the Son it was impossible to speak of the Father; without Christ one could not understand the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that this emphasis is now shifting, and that it should do so. The deep concern with anthropological questions requires of us, indeed forces us, to recognize the importance of the doctrine of the Spirit. Will this lead to giving it a place of central importance?

I. Starting from transcendental theology, which from the 1920's has given a great impulse to theology, I will now orient myself by reference to three great figures: Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Gerrit Jan Heering, Professor at the Remonstrant Seminary, Leyden, 1917–49.

Barth discusses the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in his chapter, The Revelation of God.[2] Jesus Christ, he says, is the objective reality of the revelation, who from this reality becomes the objective possibility of the revelation. Behind this stands God's freedom with respect to man. This objective reality and possibility being extant, the descent of the Holy Spirit may take place as the subjective reality of the revelation, from which the subjective possibility for man proceeds. Behind this lies man's freedom with respect to God. Through the descent of the Holy Spirit man receives his existence, that is to say, man is so gripped and changed by it, that he receives his existence only from the revelation. The important thing is that this subjective reality of the revelation is quite dependent upon the objective reality (Jesus Christ); so dependent that the subjective reality (Holy Spirit) is altogether enclosed within the objective.

This means that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is hemmed in by Christology and cannot force a way out. The peculiar character of the Spirit consists only in this, that in the revelation it makes audible the Word of God. But the Word of God is the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which seems to be independent, has once more been absorbed into the circle of Christology. Notice, too, that all this has validity only within the

[2] Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, I.2.Par.16. Zurich, 1945.

Church; but we must specially bear in mind that the Holy Spirit's point of impact is upon individual personality.

With Brunner things are different.[3] For him Pneumatology is not imprisoned within Christology, but presupposes it. He states it thus: man's existence and end is determined by God's work; the issue is the meeting between God Himself and man. There are three levels on which this work and meeting are to be found: on the level of Creation (God, Creator and Father); of Redemption (Christ); and of Regeneration (Holy Spirit). This corresponds with our three-dimensional existence in time — past, present and future. The doctrine concerning Christ (redemption in the present) would lose its meaning without the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Christ brings into our lives the new 'whence' (Woher) after the first 'whence?' is answered by our creation. This new 'whence' has its reality in the fact that we have come from God's infinite love. Thus my past as a creature is annulled and restored. But my existence has now to be directed towards the future, otherwise life is like a film which shows a man jumping but who is suddenly suspended in mid-air. To anticipate the future and to direct man towards it, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit makes us participate in God's Sonship in advance (Rom. viii 14). And only when this happens does the present (Christ's redemptive work) acquire meaning. This is the direct work of the Holy Spirit in and for the personality, and may issue in a community, the religious community. Then what happens? Again Christ is central to the community, and Christology becomes the starting-point after the work of the Holy Spirit is accomplished. The important point is that here, too, Christology is central, though Pneumatology is not enclosed within it, but has a function of its own. Yet it is tested and realized by Christology which remains the norm for the Spirit. This latter may be the confessional element, but not the critical element. Christ remains the norm for the Holy Spirit. And again we must bear in mind that here too the impact of the Holy Spirit takes place within the personality.

The third point of orientation is G. J. Heering, whose theology

[3] Vom Werk des Heiligen Geistes. (Concerning the Work of the Holy Spirit.) Three Lectures to the University of Copenhagen, p. 10. Zurich, 1934.

is more open, dynamic and mobile. The Spirit of God is equated with the Spirit of Christ, who is in turn equated with the Holy Spirit.[4] These three form one strong identity. The Spirit is the continuous stream flowing in the process of revelation, and has both a divine and a human aspect. As Holy Spirit it is the revelation of God in man, and is also received as such by man through faith. We possess this Holy Spirit in our faith. It is God's gift to us. Christ, the historical revelation, becomes a personal revelation in and through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit connects God's Spirit with that of man, and operates where revelation and faith meet each other. The Holy Spirit is God's living connection between revelation and faith, not to be conceived of, however, without Christ. He possessed the Spirit in reality; we possess it only in faith. Through religious man this divine revelation can issue in the religious community. This happened at Pentecost where the ecstatic-prophetic found an historical culminating point. For Heering, too, Christ and Christology take a central place. The Holy Spirit flows through Christ into man whose entire, or religious, personality being involved, is awakened by it.

Summing up, we find in these three dogmatists one point of agreement: it is in the human personality, the individual life of man, that the impact with the Holy Spirit takes place. With Barth this occurs only within the Church; with Brunner it happens within the personality and issues in the Church; with Heering the Spirit flows into the Church or congregation through those who believe in Christ and therefore in God's holy love. These three theologians differ, among other things, in their conception of the religious community, but they correspond in the direct connection they find between the Holy Spirit and the human personality. In all three this direct involvement of the personality is central.

II. In order to advance we must now orient ourselves by the Scriptural data. Besides doctrine, the New Testament contains the Gospel story, a reflection of what was lived and preached in the Christian community concerning the relation between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We may start from this, that

[4] Geloof en Openbaring (Faith and Revelation), pp. 173 ff. Arnhem, 1950.

in all four Gospels Jesus Christ stands as the bearer of the Spirit, who therefore only seldom operates directly. When Jesus leaves the world, however, the nature and operation of the Spirit will become evident. According to their canonical order, the line we are now tracing through the Gospels ends with St. John where Jesus, having appeared to his disciples after death, endows them with the Holy Spirit (John xx 22). Towards the close of the Synoptic Gospels we read of personal appearances: to the Marys, after which Jesus commands his disciples to teach all nations (Matthew xxviii 19 f.); in St. Mark's account the injunction is to preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mark xvi 15) and, anticipating our theme, believers "shall speak with new tongues" (Mark xvi 17). After the appearances to the women and the travellers to Emmaus, in St. Luke's Gospel, the injunction to preach is followed by an instruction to wait for an enduement of power "from on high" (Luke xxiv 49). We must also bear in mind that in Luke i 17 'spirit' and 'power' appear together. Finally, in St. John's Gospel, Jesus bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. There are personal appearances to Mary, and later to Thomas, besides that at which ten disciples are present and receive a sacramental command concerning the remission and retaining of sins (John xx 23). This action is reminiscent of the Day of Atonement.

It is important to notice that the action of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel stories differs from the expositions of the dogmatists for whom the impact of the Holy Spirit occurs within the individual person. In the Gospels, personal meeting with Jesus occurs during his life or after the crucifixion, but the Holy Spirit comes to the group, the circle of disciples. After washing their feet Jesus explains to the Twelve that the Paraclete will come to them all together, will teach them, bring to mind Christ's words and lead them into all truth (John xiv 26; xvi 13). The personal element, therefore, lies in the contact with the person of Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit is the binding element in the group or circle.

This standpoint is expressed in other New Testament books, but here we shall look only at The Acts of the Apostles. There Peter stands in the circle. His first work is to complete the

Twelve again. He is the central figure at Pentecost, and when the Holy Spirit descends upon them he speaks as the representative of the circle. But to St. Paul, who journeys alone to Damascus, it is not the Holy Spirit who comes, but Jesus who appears to him in person: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" "Who art thou Lord?" "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

We must not, therefore, draw a line from the historical revelation or objective reality of Jesus Christ to the personal revelation or subjective reality of the Holy Spirit. It is not like this in the New Testament. In the Gospel stories the line runs from personal contact with Jesus Christ to the gift of the Spirit, of which He was the bearer. The circle then becomes the bearer. Starting from the congregation, as first given historical reality, the line runs from the community in the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ. He is second; the Holy Spirit is first. In my opinion J. E. Fison states it rightly in his book, The Blessing of the Holy Spirit. Discussing the words 'holy' and 'spirit' in the Bible he points out that 'holy' is strongly emphasized in the Old Testament, and proceeds to show — following G. K. Barrett's The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition (S.P.C.K. 1947) — that there is a great change in the New Testament. There *hagios*, like *pneuma*, is a dangerous word and needs reinterpreting before it can be safely used. For the New Testament writers "the spirit is primary and holy is secondary. They saw more danger in a perverted and static and defensive religion of holiness than in an eccentric and twisted but dynamic and aggressive religion of the spirit." The important thing about the first Christian congregations was that they were communities of the Spirit! But then the two freshly-handled words 'holy' and 'spirit' are combined. Upon this pivot everything turns. *For the New Testament writers the conception of the Holy Spirit was the central idea.* "In the novel combination of both words, holy and spirit, they characterized the uniqueness of the new religion." [5] This means that the doctrine of the Spirit should have priority. It is true that Fison, after drawing this conclusion from his study of the New Testament, still arrives in a roundabout way at a theology which makes Christology its starting-point. He is, perhaps, too tightly bound by rigid church tradition;

[5] The Blessing of the Holy Spirit. J. E. Fison, p. 109.

but we must keep in mind the point that pneumatology should be given priority, for it leads us to that spirit which is the binding element of the circle, and also its *critical* element!

III. In order to show this we must note briefly the function and nature of the Holy Spirit. St. John's Gospel, the Gospel of the endowment of the Spirit, describes the function against a transcendental background. "When the Paraclete has come whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, which issues from the Father, he will bear witness as to what I am" (John xv 26; translation, E. V. Rieu). The first part indicates that the relation is going to be established by God; the second that it will be contact with a group to whom witness will be borne as to what Jesus was. This will happen in three different ways. The Holy Spirit will *teach* the disciples; will *call to their minds all that Jesus has said to them*, and then *lead them into all truth* (John xiv 26 and xvi 13). Teach them! From what? Recall to their minds! From what source? Lead them on their way! Through what wood? These words are St. John's version of Matthew's words at the end of the parables (Matthew xiii 52): "A Doctor of the Law, a scribe, has only to be schooled in the Kingdom of Heaven to be like a householder with a store of treasures new and old at his disposal" (translation E. V. Rieu).

What is this 'store of treasures'? What is the source from which, according to John, the Holy Spirit will teach and bring all to mind again? What is the wood through which he will guide the way? What if it should be the Holy Scriptures? Or more exactly, the written and unwritten tradition? — that is to say, both the Scriptures and the living tradition which is ever reforming and renewing itself, and from which the Scriptures themselves have also sprung? The disciples lived with and from the Old Testament. St. Luke, among others, gives clear proof of this. He makes the unknown companion on the Emmaus road (xxiv 27 44), who later turns out to be Jesus, expound the Scriptures. Whatever passages were chosen are seen in relation to Christ. In Acts viii 26 Philip is guided to the eunuch's chariot, and from the passage in Isaiah, the evangelist begins to preach Jesus. Thus the Holy Spirit will operate in the circle of the disciples, teaching them to read the Scriptures with new eyes. To this new reading they

will testify. Indeed, does not the last chapter of Mark say that "they shall speak with new tongues?" (xvi 17).

Here a detailed inquiry should be made into the speaking with tongues (glossolalia) recorded in Acts ii and 1 Corinthians xiv–xvi, but it is impossible here. Yet I shall not pass it by completely. Look at the story of Pentecost which we customarily see in the light of an ecstatic exaltation. The account is confused and confusing. The sound "as of a rushing mighty wind" and tongues "like as of fire" fascinate us and lead us to the thought of ecstasy so that too little attention is paid to *what was spoken with tongues.* We are told that the speech referred to "the wonderful works of God" (v 11). It is not difficult to see the correspondence between the phenomena of Pentecost and the winds and fire which operate, according to Psalm civ 4, as God's angels and ministers. This Psalm belongs to the group (CIII–CVII) which praises the Lord for His great works in creation and history. The important thing in Acts is not wind and fire, but that a time has come when once again God sends His messengers and ministers, filled with the Holy Spirit which makes them speak with tongues. *Glossa* may mean 'tongue' or 'language', and also "a word or a part of Scripture (mostly old), which requires exposition, an altered or new exposition given by commentators." Then the word 'glossa' begins to mean the explanation itself: an explanation which, written in the margin as a comment upon the text, was left there but gradually became incorporated into the text. Thus the Scriptures grew, handed down by oral tradition, absorbing ever more elements. Thus in particular did those scriptures grow, which were to be stamped by religious authorities as Holy Scriptures. The classic glossators of the Alexandrian School were famous. The leaders of Temple and Synagogue, the Scribes and Doctors of the Law, but also the leaders of sects, joined in their own ways the group of acknowledged or unacknowledged glossators who worked in the field of Holy Scripture. Psalm 1, which is an introduction to all the Psalms, calls that man blessed who does not sit in the circle of scoffers but meditates in God's law "day and night." "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (v 6). And the way to be followed, along

which the great works of God could be seen, led through a definite choice of passages (pericopes) from the Old Testament.

In their interpretation the schools might differ; tradition had all but established the route, and in general there was little difference in their explanations. We shall be led astray through rendering 'glossai' too easily as 'languages'. In the story of Pentecost 'languages' are called 'dialectoi'. Clearer insight is obtained when we translate 'glossai' as 'pericopes', chosen passages of Scripture — with or without a commentary.

Now the substantive 'glossa' is connected with the verb 'lalein,' and the ecstatic element is suddenly introduced here: 'glossolalia.' But 'lalein' does not mean to speak in a confusing manner: it nearly always means to speak in an ordinary way, and is sometimes related to the adverb 'orthos,' orderly (cf. Mark vii 35). This is contrary to what is suggested by the story of Pentecost. The 'glossai" form the contents of what is spoken as in Ephesians v 19: "Speak to yourselves in Psalms," which means the reciting of psalms, singing or half-singing. This was done during public worship and contained the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Those acquainted with the East or the world of Islam know the place occupied by the recitation of Holy Scripture, and for what lengths of time it may be sustained. The recitation may sometimes be monotonous or expressed in the manner of an incantation, but that is quite different from what we understand by the ecstatic declarations under the power of the Spirit at Pentecost. What matters is to see that 'speaking with tongues' formed a usual part of public worship, namely, the reading or reciting aloud of fixed passages of Scripture whose order was according to tradition.

What happened then at Pentecost? Evidently something so radically different that "they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" (Acts ii 12). Verse 4 says that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other 'glossai' as the spirit gave them utterance. 'Heteros' (other) means 'contrary' in most instances, rather than 'something different.' Galatians i 6 speaks about "another Gospel." St. Paul does not mean merely a divergent Gospel, but one which is contrary to the Gospel of Christ. 'Heteros' is a definite thing,

intentionally chosen and set over against what was given before. Thus 'other tongues' are pericopes different from those given by tradition.

In the midst of the many devout Jews "out of every nation under heaven" who were in Jerusalem at the time, different dialects were spoken by the disciples, or rather by all those who were "with one accord in one place," probably the 120 mentioned in Acts i 15. Those who might be supposed to speak the Galilean dialect of Aramaic now spoke all kinds of Aramaic dialects such as were spoken in Jerusalem by Jews "out of every nation." This remarkable thing confounded the multitude, but when people became conscious of what was really happening they recognized that the one hundred and twenty were proclaiming the wonderful works of God — "in our 'glossai' " they say to each other (ii 11); in 'glossai' from our Scriptures. But they are not the pericopes expected on this feast-day; they are different from those prescribed by tradition. The interpretation given by the disciples is so foolish that men could only scoff at them and accuse them of drunkenness. But we recognize in the event the word stated in Mark xvi 17 that those who believe "shall speak with new tongues." This is the reciting of pericopes as is customary in public worship, certainly on feast-days, but the radical change is that the disciples either chose pericopes other than the familiar ones, or interpreted them differently. We need not be long in doubt as to the purport of this new and contrary interpretation: the pericopes were expounded in such a way as to point to Jesus. This, and the reaction of the multitude, caused such confusion that Peter, with the eleven, rises, intervenes and delivers an address comprising three 'glossai' or pericopes: one from the prophet Joel and two from the Psalms. His exposition points so convincingly to Jesus that those present "were pricked in their heart" and said, "What shall we do?" This 'glossolalia' of Peter was no ecstatic talk; it was decisive expository preaching. About three thousand were baptized the same day with the promise that they too should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, enabling them to understand the Scriptures in this new, convincing and moving way. This was the work of the Holy Spirit, and rendered the new sect dangerous and insufferable. For it is a dangerous thing to put the Holy Spirit above Holy

Scripture and the official Divine Service, and for men themselves to act as 'angels and ministers' of God. Only expulsion could follow this.

In this light we may now understand the scene in Luke iv 14–30 where Jesus returns to Galilee and visits the Nazareth synagogue on the sabbath day. He reads a pericope from Isaiah but interprets it in a way which could not be accepted. At first the congregation listens with approbation, but when unexpectedly he interprets a passage from 1 Kings xviii about Elijah as concerning himself, the mood of his audience turns against him. Such interpretation is not permissible. The angry people drive him out with the intention of hurling him off the prominence on which their city stood. That, indeed, would be the fate of those who combined the two dangerous words 'holy' and 'spirit,' and proclaimed this to be the uniqueness of their religion.

IV. Has what has been said been a long discourse in Biblical Theology? This theology must at least give us guidance concerning the doctrine of the Spirit. I have given it this ample space only in order that we may see the way we must take. Our starting-point is that the Holy Spirit is the binding and testing element, the confessional and critical element, combining for disciples the right way. It is the great task of our congregations to gather people who want to think, to use their wills and to live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel story the moment arrives in which Jesus endows His disciples with the Holy Spirit. When, in our public worship, we have heard the Gospel of which Jesus Christ is the centre, and have lived through it with Him, there comes the moment when we, too, are sent forth once more into the world. There the Holy Spirit will guide us and help us to adopt a critical attitude towards this life and the world. But when we return and are again confronted with the preaching of the Gospel, still guided by the Spirit we shall adopt an attitude of religious criticism, a constructive attitude towards the conception of Christ that is preached to us. If we owe our conception of God to Jesus Christ and, in a beautiful metaphor, His Gospel is the great window through which we may see God in His truth,[6] then the Holy Spirit is the Spirit

[6] Geloof en Openbaring. C. J. Heering, p. 283.

of the house in whose wall the window is placed. That is to say: we approach the conception of Christ, led by the Holy Spirit. Viewed in this way, the value of the study of the life of Jesus will be enhanced. Indeed, it is necessary that we prepare ourselves and that we seek to submit our own spirit and thought to the pressure of the Holy Spirit, to be imbued by it, so that the Paraclete may *teach* us, *call everything to our minds*, and *guide* us. Indeed, we may pray: *Veni Creator Spiritus.*

It seems to me that there is great confusion in the Christological questions studied today, and that these studies are the weak point of the Ecumenical Movement, the rock on which it might split. It stands in the midst of increasingly complicated questions of theology, and will not be able to concern itself with much more than the problems of Christology. Our task seems to be, therefore, to help to prevent it from ending in a blind alley or morass of dogmatism, and ever to affirm that the heart of Christology is compassion. It is incumbent upon us, then, to make the doctrine of the Spirit central. I should also be inclined to say: *The first half of the twentieth century was a time of Christology: the second half will have to be a time for Pneumatology, the Doctrine of the Spirit.* This will entail hard work in the fields of Biblical Theology, Psychology and the Philosophy of Religion, and equally hard work in the domain of Dogmatics.

Let me finally advance three brief but urgent points:

1. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth which will lead us inexorably to the truth concerning the great deeds of God, even though it may lead us upon a track other than the one we follow through a traditional and over-simplified Biblical Theology.

2. The Holy Spirit is Love (agape). 1 Corinthians xiii is the link between chapters xii and xiv, speaking, as it does, in 'glossai,' and by affirming that 'glossolalia' is altogether determined by love. Romans v 5 also speaks about that love of God which is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us."

3. The world (and we ourselves are part of the world) will ask for the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and rightly so. The language of our ethics is insufficiently clear because our ethics themselves are inwardly uncertain, yet we shall be judged by our fruits. Should

this be called pragmatism? Even this judgment may be of the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel's injunction still stands: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them!" (Matthew vii 20).

Is the Doctrine of the Spirit the Cinderella of Theology? Cinderella is waiting, but not for a witch. She does not ask to be permitted to dance with the others for a while, nor even to dance with the Prince. She is waiting for Prince Theology to wed her.